

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

Spring 2010

Review of *Jayhawkers: The Civil War Brigade of James Henry Lane* by Bryce Benedict

Craig Miner

Wichita State University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), [Cultural History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Miner, Craig, "Review of *Jayhawkers: The Civil War Brigade of James Henry Lane* by Bryce Benedict" (2010). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 2586.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/2586>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Jayhawkers: The Civil War Brigade of James Henry Lane. By Bryce Benedict. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009. xiv + 343 pp. Map, figures, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. \$32.95.

While this book contains a good deal of useful information, both its research and approach are flawed. The presentation is often tedious, freighted as it is with undigested detail.

The major question must be why so much detail of the military action of the so-called Lane Brigade (the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Kansas Volunteer Regiments) is significant when the personality and background of Lane himself is mostly left out. Benedict opens with a disclaimer that his book is not a biography of Lane, and includes "only the most cursory background information." The reader is referred for Lane's biography to a piece by Wendell Holmes Stephenson published in 1930. Much strong secondary literature on Lane

and his war activities since is entirely missing. There have been two book-length biographies of Lane published recently—Robert Collins's *Jim Lane: Scoundrel, Statesman, Kansan* (2007) and Ian Spurgeon's *Man of Douglas, Man of Lincoln: The Political Odyssey of James Henry Lane* (2008)—which are not used. National press coverage of Lane, both before the war and during it, is immense, and largely unavailed of here. To say that Lane personally is not significant is not sufficient to make the approach credible. Without him, there remains only the workaday story of an obscure border unit.

Insofar as the book talks about Lane personally, it is to defend him as a responsible military commander. However, much of the contemporary evidence, some quoted here, is strongly in the other direction. It is difficult to establish that Lane was a "team player" in the chain of command rather than the "loose cannon" he was widely regarded to be. While in some ways Lane's reputation recently has been on the rise, this form of revisionism is not convincing.

Lane, a U.S. Senator at the time, and therefore forbidden from taking a field command, was supposedly acting as a regular officer rather than a latter-day Jayhawker. The stories of his irresponsibility and his unauthorized looting raids are said by the author to be overdrawn, if not fabricated. Even so, the book is entitled *Jayhawkers*.

In short, this book works better as a reference than as a plausible interpretation or an interesting read.

CRAIG MINER
Department of History
Wichita State University